

Iran

1) Top places to visit:

Astane Qods-e Razavi Complex, Khorasan Razavi Province



Astane Qods-e Razavi is a complex of architectural and memorial monuments, which consists of the sacred shrine of Razavi and the surrounding buildings and monuments. This complex of monuments has been built through centuries and is a highly respected place due to the spirituality and importance associated with the sacred shrine of Imam Reza (A.S). It is considered as a selected example of Iranians' and Shiites' skills in arts and architecture.

Naqsh-e Jahan Square Complex, Esfahan Province



Naqsh-e Jahan Square (Imam Square) is an important historical site and one of UNESCO's World Heritage Sites. It has 4 fundamental structures, Abbasi Jame Mosque, Ali-Qapu Palace, Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, and the façade of Gheisariyeh Bazaar.

Chogha Zanbil, Khuzestan Province



The Chogha Zanbil Ziggurat is located 45 kilometers southeast of Susa. It is the only remnant art of the ancient city (about 1300 BC) of "Untashgal," which was two kilometers away from the Dez River. It is the most important remnant of the Elamite civilization. This city has three interconnected, mud-brick walls. The main gate of the city is in the area surrounded by the large eastern wall. There are some remnants of the water filtrations, which are considered as the oldest water installations. They are located between the second and the third walls. The Ziggurat's main temple is in the center of the area and surrounded by the third wall.

The main temple's dimensions are 105 m by 105 m. Millions of bricks were used in building the temple's five floors, and unfortunately, only two floors have survived. Except for the first and fifth floor, all other floors were made with mud-brick fillings. The fifth floor was where the idols of gods and where the goddesses were kept. The most important goddess of the time was called "Inshishunak," who was the special goddess of Susa City. The cuneiform engraved bricks on the walls of the temple, which have the same piece of writing, manifest the name of the king and the purpose of the temple's construction. The city and the works belonged to the Elamite civilization in Haft Tape in 640 BC. They were devastated by the raid of the Assyrians' (who are named after their commander, Ashurbanipal), which overturned the Elamite sovereignty that had lasted for thousands of years. This building is also registered by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site.

Soltanieh Dome, Zanjan Province



This monument is 35 kilometers away from Zanjan. It is located in the town of Soltanieh, which is a manifestation of beauty and taste. It was built by Soltan Mohamed Khodabandeh (Oljaitu) during 1302–12 AD in the city of Soltanieh, the capital of the Ilkhanid dynasty. The building of this monument, which is unique in its type, spanned thirteen years. The plan of the monument is octagonal and the monument contains eight verandas and eight minarets. The height of the dome is 48.5 meters, and the diameter of the mouth is 36 meters.

It is the third largest dome in size after the Santa Maria in Italy's Florence and the Hagia Sophia in Turkey's Istanbul. However, it is the world's largest brick-made dome, which has two stages of decoration: brick and tile ornamentation and plaster and stone painting. This dome is also registered by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site.

Persepolis, Fars Province



Founded by Darius I in 518 BC, Persepolis was the capital of the Achaemenian Empire. It consists of an immense half-artificial, half-natural terrace built on a stony hill on top of Rahmat Mountain in the Marvdasht Plain, where the king of kings created an impressive palace complex inspired by Mesopotamian models. The construction of the Persepolis palaces continued up to 150 years after the death of Darius the Great. The grandeur of these monuments continues to fascinate visitors, and the importance and quality of the monumental ruins makes it a unique archaeological site. This complex has also been registered by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site.

Bisotun, Kermanshah Province



Bisotun is a rich collection of Iran's historic and literary works, which is located 20 kilometers east of Kermanshah on the slope of Bisotun Mountain. This complex consists of the Bisotun Inscription, the portrait of Parthian king, Gudarz II, the portrait of Darius the Great, Farhad engravings, Hercules' statue, the portrait of Parthian king, Mithridates, and stones with Pahlavi inscriptions.

The Bisotun Inscription, which is the most important design in this collection, was engraved in stone in 522 BC on Darius' command. It describes 25 years of Darius' wars while holding the throne. There are writings on the margin of the Bisotun Inscription in three languages: ancient Parsi, Elamite, and Akkadian as well as the popular accent of the time, neo-Babel. The inscription, written in ancient Parsi in 44 lines, is engraved beautifully in cuneiform. Darius, in every refrain of the inscription, says, "King Darius states that." The repetition of this phrase gives a special dignity and grandness to the style of the inscription. This collection has also been registered by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site.

Qara Kelisa, West Azarbaijan Province



Located south of Maku in the northern Iranian province of West Azarbaijan, the massive St. Thaddeus Church, literally known as Qara Kelisa, meaning black church, is one of the oldest and most notable surviving Christian monuments in Iran. It was constructed in 68 AD by one of the

apostles of Jesus, Saint Thaddeus, who traveled to Armenia, which was then part of the Persian Empire, to preach the teachings of Christ. Armenians hold Qara Kelisa as the world's first church. Qara Kelisa has been registered as the ninth Iranian historical-cultural heritage site on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Takht-e Soleyman, West Azarbaijan Province



Takht-e Soleyman is an outstanding ensemble of royal architecture, joining the principal architectural elements created by the Sassanians in a harmonious composition inspired by their natural context. The archaeological site of Takht-e Soleyman, in northwestern Iran, is situated in a valley set in a volcanic mountain region. The site includes the principal Zoroastrian sanctuary, partly rebuilt during the Ilkhanid period (13th century), and the temple dedicated to Anahita of the Sassanian period (6th and 7th centuries).

The site has an important symbolic significance. The designs of the fire temple, the palace, and the general layout strongly influenced the development of Islamic architecture. The ensemble of Takht-e Soleyman is an exceptional testimony to the continuation of the fire and water-related cult over a period of two and half millennia.

Pasargad, Fars Province



Pasargad was the first dynastic capital of the Achaemenian Empire, founded by Cyrus the Great in the Fars Province, homeland of the Persians in the 6th century BC. Its palaces, gardens, and the mausoleum of Cyrus are outstanding examples of the first phase of royal Achaemenian art

and architecture and exceptional testimonies of Persian civilization. Particularly noteworthy vestiges in the 160-ha site include: the Mausoleum of Cyrus, Tall-e-Takht, a fortified terrace, and a royal ensemble of gatehouse, audience hall, residential palace and gardens. Pasargad was the capital of the first great multicultural empire in Western Asia. Spanning the Eastern Mediterranean and Egypt to the Hindus River, it is considered to be the first empire that respected the cultural diversity of its different peoples. This was reflected in Achaemenian architecture, a synthetic representation of different cultures. The "Four Gardens" type of royal ensemble, which was created in Pasargad, became a prototype for architecture and design in Western Asia.

2) Best time to visit Iran:

The optimal time to visit the northern and eastern provinces of Afghanistan is during the summer, and Spring's New Year's holiday draws vacationers to Mazar-e-Sharif for the Rose Festival, Jashn-e-Gol-e-Sorkh. The southern and western provinces are more enjoyable during the spring.